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FROM AMBASSADOR VAN VOORST

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [NATO](#) [KWMN](#) [IC](#)

SUBJECT: Scen setter for the Secretary's meeting with Icelandic
Foreign Minister Gisladdottir

Classified By: Amb. Carol van Voorst for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) Icelandic Foreign Minister Ingibjorg Solrun Gisladdottir's visit to Washington April 10-12 will be her first visit with a bilateral agenda. Since her Social Democratic Alliance party came into government last June, she has quickly forged a solid relationship with her center-right coalition partner Prime Minister Haarde (whom you met in Washington in 2006) and has assumed full control over the foreign affairs and defense brief. She initially underestimated the demands of the job; Gisladdottir came in with expectations of being able to take lengthy vacations in the Nordic tradition and dividing her time equally between statecraft and domestic party leadership. The latter task has been roughly shoved aside in the last six months as the FM has been constantly on the road, largely in support of Iceland's UN Security Council bid. Mastering the defense and security issues in her portfolio (Iceland has neither a military nor a separate Ministry of Defense) has also been a challenge, though one that Gisladdottir has tackled well.

Still an activist, learning statesmanship

¶2. (C/NF) In person, Gisladdottir's habitual body language is closed and stern; she often spends the first part of a meeting with arms crossed and her jaw tight. This does not necessarily mean she disagrees, but warmth takes a while to percolate through and her interlocutors may not learn that their message was taken on board until later. Our experience over the last year is that she has firm views, but listens closely and is willing to change her mind.

¶3. (C) Gisladdottir is a shrewd politician with an activist streak, in the Nordic social democratic mold. She keeps in close touch with Norwegian FM Store. On foreign policy issues, she tends to bend to public opinion rather than set the tone herself. As a socialist in a party with a strong pacifist wing, Gisladdottir is uncomfortable with the appearance or use of force and struggles with the need to blend Icelandic civilian expertise into military (i.e., NATO) peacekeeping operations. She has forcefully expressed her anger over the issue of alleged CIA rendition flights through Iceland. At the same time, her skill in asserting her independence in foreign policy means that under her watch, Iceland passed its first-ever defense budget and is reforming its defense sector with barely a whisper of controversy. Formerly taboo subjects like the establishment of an intelligence analysis unit have been folded into this move with nothing resembling

the hue and cry surrounding the previous coalition government's attempt to do so. Her credibility on the renditions issue meant she was able to immediately squash a recent opposition call for a parliamentary inquiry.

Meeting topics

14. (C) NATO/Afghanistan: On Afghanistan, the FM will be eager to share her impressions from her March 15-17 trip to Kabul and Meymaneh. Iceland has 14 civilian peacekeepers deployed with NATO and is developing a three-year plan for future involvement. We strongly encouraged this first Icelandic cabinet-level trip to Afghanistan, which has pumped sorely needed information into the contentious debate here about why Iceland should care about Afghanistan. Gisladdottir is interested in USG views on how Iceland can best contribute, but Ministry sources tell us that the emphasis is firmly planted in civilian tasks that look much like traditional development aid. We were disappointed last April when Gisladdottir's predecessor pulled Iceland's mobile liaison team out of PRT Chaghcharan, and have lobbied her without success to renew that contribution. We should push the Icelanders to greatly step up their support for police training, which may also allow them to blend in elements relating to the status of women (a heartfelt personal concern of Gisladdottir's).

15. (C) The High North: In Bucharest, Gisladdottir and PM Haarde will announce Iceland's sponsorship of a NATO conference on security in the High North in January 2009. Iceland has in ever-stronger terms called for increased Alliance focus on its North Atlantic neighborhood. Pointing to the implications of the melting Arctic ice for maritime security and resources exploitation, Gisladdottir will probably mention Iceland's acute awareness of a more assertive and visible Russia in the North Atlantic. U.S. exercises and ship visits have helped to ease these concerns, and NATO's new air policing mission here beginning this April (with the French in one of their first NATO common defense tasks since de Gaulle; a U.S. rotation is slated for August 2008) has been warmly welcomed. Gisladdottir and her government now feel it is time that NATO think seriously about conventional security concerns in this part of the world, building on previous discussions about climate change and shipping security.

16. (SBU) Women and Peace: Gisladdottir founded Iceland's Women's List political party in the 1980s, and though that particular feminist group has been subsumed in her Social Democratic Alliance party, the FM still places immense importance on gender issues. Her ministry just produced Iceland's action plan for implementing UNSCR 1325 on the role of women in peacebuilding and security, and Gisladdottir will want to raise this as an entree to the topic of the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Palestinian-Israeli Peace. Gisladdottir believes passionately that women have a special contribution to make to sustainable peace, and reportedly was appalled by the conditions endured by women in Afghanistan.

17. (C/NF) UN Security Council Campaign: Though unlikely to press hard on Iceland's UNSC bid, Gisladdottir will undoubtedly remind us that Iceland would appreciate U.S. support for a seat in 2009-10. The UNSC campaign is coloring in ever-stronger hues the conduct of Iceland's foreign policy; Gisladdottir has made two trips to African Union meetings in the last year and just returned from a Caribbean visit, both regions not routinely toured by her predecessors. More significantly, there are signs that Iceland delayed its recognition of Kosovo last month to try to avoid antagonizing Russia. Gisladdottir has taken harsh criticism within her own party for her initially weak statements on the situation in Tibet, which many saw as a sop to the Chinese. Similarly, the MFA concedes that a campaign trip to Iran last month by Gisladdottir's deputy was an embarrassing mistake. The learning curve for both the Minister and her MFA has been steep, and Iceland is getting a thorough introduction to the rough-and-tumble world they will be entering should they win a seat this fall.

18. (C) Other issues: Whaling continues to be an irritant as there are rumblings that Iceland may allow commercial whaling again this year. We should take the opportunity to point out that this step would not win them many votes in the Security Council race. Iceland's economy is showing some cracks in the "northern miracle"

facade, as tightening world credit markets put the squeeze on the country's highly leveraged banking sector. In more positive news, Gisladottir may note our flourishing bilateral cooperation on clean energy, though she mostly leaves this field to others such as President Grimsson and the Minister of Industry.

van Voorst

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